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## From isolation to hope, Georgia Southern alumni join to sew masks for Atlanta hospitals

April 4, 2020



Masks for Atlanta-area healthcare workers sewed by Georgia Southern fashion merchandising and apparel design alumna Anna Ferguson.

Like so many others, Anna Ferguson, a 2009 Georgia Southern University fashion merchandising and apparel design graduate, felt helpless in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic that caused citizens around the globe to go into isolation.

Yet, a call-to-action by a grassroots distribution network, Sewing Masks for Area Hospitals – Atlanta (COVID-19), on Facebook led Ferguson, who designs all-in-one crossbody, phone case wallets for her company TREK Tech Accessories from her home in Newnan, Georgia, to repurpose her skill set for the greater good.

“I am self-employed so I have the ability and flexibility to do this with my time,” Ferguson said. “I think it’s really important to be part of the solution and not the problem.”

As Georgia’s COVID-19 cases grow by the day, the demand for masks for healthcare workers is greater than the supply. Dozens of facilities, including Emory and Piedmont Hospitals, have requested more than 8,600 masks from the group. Emory provided a template for a mask, outfitted with a pocket for a filter that is intended to cover N95 surgical masks that healthcare workers use while treating contagious patients. Typically, the masks are for single use, but as shortages abound, the group’s homemade fabric masks act as covers that can be reused with sterilization.

“If people still have the proper personal protection equipment, this is used as a cover that goes over that to prolong the life of their mask so they are not having to discard them in between patients,” explained Ferguson. “The thought is that eventually they’re going to run out. Some facilities have already run out. And this is better than nothing is what we’re being told.”

So far, the group, now almost 7,000-members strong, has delivered 2,220 masks and 1,105 are pending delivery.



## Healthcare workers at Atlanta Heart Associates wear masks distributed by Sewing Masks for Area Hospitals – Atlanta

The new task has given Ferguson a sense of purpose in unsettling times.

“It’s been a way to connect with other like-minded people who just want to do something,” she said. “People feel so helpless. We want to let them (healthcare workers) know that we care. We need our soldiers on the front line to have whatever protection they need. I feel so grateful to be able to lend my talents from the comfort of my home, where my family is safe. These healthcare heroes are feeling the anxiety and added stressors that we are all feeling and still showing up for long and grueling days. I feel like sewing masks is the very least I can contribute.”

The experience has also allowed her to create unique bonds with other Georgia Southern alumni participants, including fellow fashion merchandising and apparel design graduates Ashley Marliese, Andrew Zarzuela and Emily Barger, and College of Business graduate Christine Dudek.

“There’s been a huge sense of camaraderie in the group,” Ferguson noted. “It’s a positive, uplifting group that is making lemonade out of lemons. I’m so proud to see so many of my fellow Eagles joining the cause.”

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